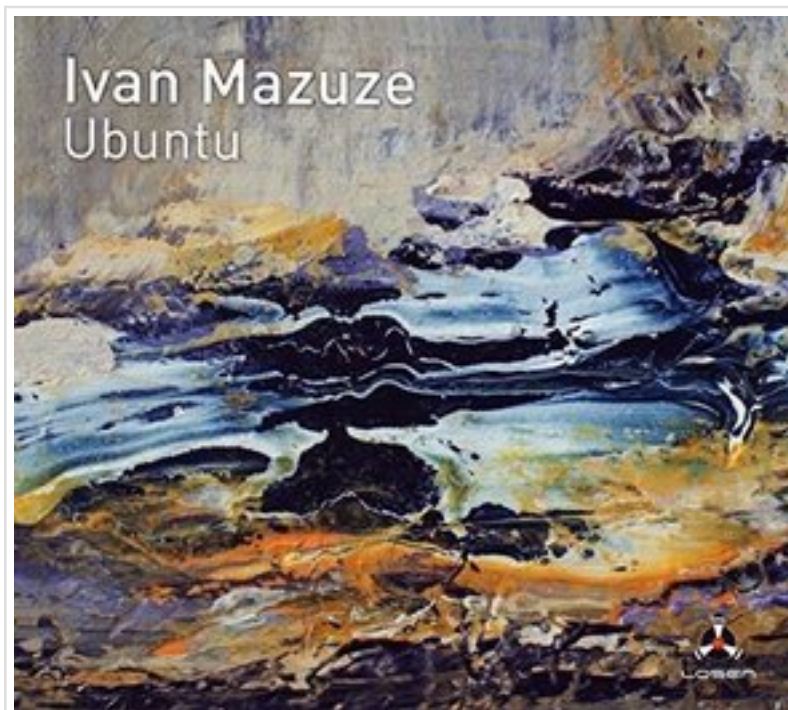




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**IVAN MAZUZE - Ubuntu**

**Losen Records LOS13902**

*Ivan Mazuze: alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute; Jacob Young: acoustic guitar, electric guitar; Michael Bloch: acoustic piano; Sifiso Makalisa: acoustic piano; Peter Ndlala: electric bass; Frank Paco: drums; Sidiki Camara: balafone.*

Knowing that Ivan Mazuze was born in Mozambique, trained in South Africa and now lives and records in Norway, might cause you to prejudge this recording. However, rather than being overtly one musical style or another, the pieces display a sophisticated mastery of song forms which put simple, elegant harmonies over shifting rhythmic patterns. The rhythms often, but not exclusively, play around with 6/8 signatures. These call to mind not only rhythms of southern Africa but also of Latin America. This is the third album that he has recorded and reveals a talented composer and multi-instrumentalist playing at the top of his game.

Many of the pieces feature Jacob Young (who records on ECM) on acoustic and electric guitars. Young's succinct strummed accompaniment compliments the lilting rhythm of the pieces beautifully, particularly on 'My Northern Lights'. Young also plays a tight solo on 'Hamaba Kahle' which complements the soloing of Mazuze on this piece.

Mazuze creates some lovely interplay with Bloch's piano. On these pieces, the dual playing of Mazuze with either guitar or piano shows not only a sensitivity in the way the players work together but also, I feel, the quality of Mazuze's compositions. The rhythm section provides intelligent and engaging support, with some marvellous bass soloing from Ndlala on a couple of tracks, particularly 'Malecon' which also features a sterling piano turn from Makalisa.

Several of the pieces are introduced by recorded sounds, such as water dripping ('Water'), children playing ('Inta Mutlhangela') or Mazuze's own grandmother and her neighbour singing in celebration of his new baby ('Celebration'). These, together with hand-clapping and the wooden xylophone-like balafone, on 'Celebration', are intended to provide some context to the pieces but I did feel that they rather detracted and distracted from the tunes themselves, which were strong enough to stand without these. Also, the pieces did not feel as if they built from these sounds so much as started once the sounds ended. However, this is a minor complaint about some very fine music that has Mazuze playing flute and soprano, alto, tenor saxophones with a lyrical and engaging lightness, full of warmth and exuberance.

**Reviewed by Chris Baber**



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